The Feast of the Brethren

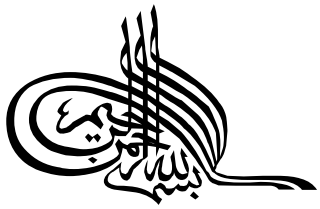
khwān al-ikhwān

of

Nāṣir-i-Khusrow Qubādīānī (d. 1088)

(ed.) Yaḥyā al-Kashshāb (Cairo: 1940), pp. 180-6.

Provisional translation
by
N. Wahid Azal



The Sixty-Seventh Section*

A discussion regarding the affirmation [or '*proof*'] of the three surpassing spiritual [or '*divine*'] branches [or '*subdivisions*'] (*far'-i-rūḥānī*) [*viz. hypostases*]: the Predecessor (*jadd*), the Opening [or '*Victory*'] (*fatḥ*) and Imagination (*khayāl*)

The spiritual [or 'divine'] [world] (*rūḥānī*) may be understood by reason of [or '*in comparative juxtaposition with*'] the material world by the proofs set according to the (metaphysical) limits (*ḥudūd*) established by the most high God. So we say to the inquirers of the science of divine reality [or '*truth*'] (*juyandigān-i-'ilm-i-ḥaqīqat*), by the command of the masters [or '*divinities*'] of truth (*khodāvandān-i-ḥaqq*), upon them be peace, that we find the material world [divided] into two foundations (*du aṣl*). One is its beneficent [or '*active cause* '] (*fā'ida dahanda*), which is the world of bodies (*ā'lam-i-jirmānī*) that is ['*illustrated*' or '*exemplified by*'] the planetary constellations (*aflāk*) and the stars (*anjum*). The other is the beneficiary ['*receptacle*', or '*causal*

---

* **Note on translation**: Transliterations from Persian are placed inside round brackets **()** as are some elaborations. Alternative readings and a few elaborations have been placed inside square brackets **[]** with words or phrases *italicized* inside single quotation marks **['']**. Ellipses **...** indicate the omission of Nasir-i-Khosrow's Persian paraphrase of the Qur'anic verse or *akhbār* he has quoted just before in the original Arabic. Where they occur these have not been translated. Instead the discussion resumes from the point where the Persian paraphrase ends. Translations from the Qur'an are amended translations from Pickthall's (usually a single word or two changed from Pickthall's orginal). A literal rendering has been striven for but in several instances this has not been possible.

effect'] (*fā'ida pazīr*) that are the four elements (*ṭabā'iya-i-chahārgāna*), which occur under the planetary constellations.

We will find [all] generation [or '*origination*'] (*zāyish*) to occur from among the male and female [*dyads*] of this threefold [progression], whether mineral, vegetable or animal; so, therefore, we hold the material world to be divided into these five parts: two from it in the rank (*manzilat*) of mother and father (*mādar va pidar*), and three from them in the rank of children (*farzandān*). As such this condition conclusively proves that the supernal [spiritual] world (*ā'lam-i-'uluvvī*) is likewise divided into five parts: two from it in the rank of heaven and earth (*āsmān va zamīn*) and three among them in the rank of generated outcomes (*ḥāṣil āmadigān*). And he testifies to the correctness [or '*truth*'] of the saying in this [following] statement made by the Messenger, upon him be peace: "*Between my Lord and I there are five intermediaries* (*wasā'iṭ*): *Gabriel* (*jibrā'īl*), *Michael* (*mikā'īl*), *Raphael* (*isrāfīl*), *the Tablet* (*al-lawḥ*) *and the Pen* (*al-qalam*)"...

The esoteric exegesis (*tawīl*) of this report (*khabar*) is this, that the Omnipotent Lord (*parvadigār*) wishes, by the command [or '*cause*'] (*amr*) of the Creator (*bārī*), for the complete appearance of the cause (*amr*) to come forth from the path of the Resurrector (*qā'im*), upon him be the most excellent salutations; and the prophets, upon them be peace, from that portion of which they [each] acquired from the command of the Creator, informed creation regarding the [future] appearance of the Resurrector and so put the dread into them; and it is for this reason that they are known as prophets because they have informed the creation of the coming Resurrector.

The pure ['*legitimate*,' '*holy*' or '*chaste*'] (*pārsā*) prophets are those proclaimers (*khabar dahandegān*); for the most high God identified the prophets as the ones who proclaim. For this reason they appraised creation of the [coming] Resurrector and called creation to him; and the Resurrector, upon him be the most excellent salutations, was announced from its [God's?] essence (*az ẓāt-i-ū khabar khand*) inasmuch as he is the [one] proclaimed from the command [or '*cause*'] of the Creator, glory be to him, just as he uttered [or '*commanded by*'], his words: "*Whereof do they question one another regarding the mighty news concerning which they are in disagreement*" (*Qur'ān* **78:1-3**) ...

And many of the people say that it is a day the duration of which is fifty-thousand years. It is the day wherein the most high God shall hold creation to account; and one group largely hold that this indicates the *Mahdī* who shall come and reveal the

religion of God and convert all infidels to *Islām*. Another group mostly say that this report indicates the *Executor* [or '*legatee*'] (*waṣī*) of the Messenger, upon him be peace. The folk of truth [or '*reality*'] (*ahl-i-ḥaqīqat*) generally agree that the *proclamation* refers to that person by reason of whose *announcement* the prophets, upon them be peace, have been named as necessary.

The chosen (*muṣtafā*) Messenger, upon him be peace, has told us in the aforementioned report that '*Between God and I there are five intermediaries*' and the first to be mentioned was Gabriel, who is a proximate angel (*firishtih-i-muqarrab*) and is the envoy (*safīr*) between God and his prophets. Then he mentioned Michael whose majesty and power is greater than the majesty and power of Gabriel. Then he mentioned Raphael whereby the commands of God are issued from the reception of his tablet; then the Tablet was mentioned and then the Pen, in this order as we stated, such that from these five intermediaries, each being mightier and nobler than the next, he mentioned them [one after another] with the one lower in rank [or '*one farther behind*'] (*bāzpas tar*) [indicated] before the higher; and from this [arrangement] the lowest in rank [or '*one farthest behind*'] (*bāzpas tarīn*) is to the most high God the nearest (*nazdīktar ast*), [that is] by the nearness of knowledge (*'ilm*) and not of interval [or '*distance*'] (*musāfat*); since it is fitting that Gabriel, who is the fifth (metaphysical) limit, should be an angel from the most high God. And the Pen, which is the first (metaphysical) limit, is a pen lifeless and without knowledge; and the Tablet is a lifeless ledger upon which nothing can be written.

So we say, that from the spiritual world the Pen is in the rank [or '*descends from the grade*'] (*manzilat*) of the heavenly world within [or '*into*'] the material world, which is the Universal Intellect (*'aql-i-kull*) who (*ū*) encompasses both worlds just as the heavens encompass the material world. And the Tablet is in the rank [or '*descends from the grade*'] (*manzilat*) of the earth within the material world, and that is the Universal Soul (*nafs-i-kull*) who is the beneficiary [or '*receptacle*'] (*pazīrandih*) of the powers of the Universal Intellect and the manifester of its beneficial determinants [or 'activities'] (*fā'ida-hā*) in the eternal life (*'umr-i-jāvīdī*) just as the earth is the manifester (*padīd ārandih*) of the beneficial determinants [or '*activities*'] of the heavens and beneficiary [or '*receptacle*'] for its powers in the perishable life (*'umr-i-fānī*).

And the [relationship of the] Intelligence (*'aql*) to the Pen is illustrated in such a fashion, that until the [writer's] [straight] line (*khaṭṭ*) actually appear [that is, be drawn], it (i.e. the straight line) is unknown because the [potential] line within the pen issues from the soul of the person although a person's soul bears no [direct

ontological] resemblance or connection to the pen just as the Creator's cause [or '*command*'], glory be to him, is attached to the Intelligence without the Intelligence [necessarily] enjoying any attachment or connection to the *ipseity* (*huvīyat*) of the Creator, glory be to him, other than as the function of the manifestation of the existents from the Intelligence in the same manner as a piece of writing is obtained from the pen; for however much the wise have written [or '*described*'] how all things appear from the pen, they have also understood that whatsoever the pen should write is nothing other than it's submission (*farmān bardārī*) [to the hand which holds it]; inasmuch as that which is written is the substance (*māyih*) of the soul of the writer ['*administrator*' or '*secretary*'] (*dabīr*). They have also understood that the [generation of the] created beings, which all issue from the Intelligence as the Intelligence's effects, is likewise nothing but [the effects of this] submission [to the Creator]. This is the command of the Creator, glory be to him, which is far from the attributes of the Intelligence because whatsoever descends is from him.

And the [relationship of the] Soul to the Tablet has been characterized as the appearance of the line from the pen upon the tablet; and unless there be a tablet, neither will there take form the strength [or '*power*'] which appears from the soul of the writer by the pen. In the same manner the beneficial determinants [or '*activities*'] of the Intelligence did not take effect in the Soul and manifest within the two worlds [in any form] otherwise; and the individual [or '*individuated*'] souls of the people always gives testimony to this state for that reason, that the Intelligence is not found in the world other than among the soul of a people who have accepted it, such that there may be found [among the people] those giving discourse distinguishing between the Intelligence and the Soul; and those skills [or '*crafts*'] (*ṣa'nat-hā*) which the people are able to undertake - which are those apparent traces of the Intelligence - that is the partial Soul (*nafs-i-juz'ī*).

So it is established that the Tablet is the Universal Soul, and it is apparent that the heavens are the supernal [spiritual] world of the Intelligence, and the earth is the supernal [spiritual] world of the Soul. As such from these five (metaphysical) limits to which the Messenger of God referred, upon him peace, '*Between God and I there are five intermediaries*', two limits were indicated as being attributes equal (*bārābar*) to two pillars (*du rukn*) of the material world, with three (metaphysical) limits as the remainder, equal to three originations (*zāyish*) which has resulted in the world; and these are, Raphael, Michael and Gabriel who are equal to three originations (*zāyish*) of the material world which are the mineral, vegetable and animal.

So we say, just as the origination of the material world first resulted [in the appearance of] the mineral, and after it the vegetable and after that the animal, it is necessary that from these two mighty (metaphysical) limits the first should be the Predecessor (*jadd*), and after it the Opening (*fatḥ*) and after that the Imagination (*khayāl*). Therefore, from the [the perspective of the] spiritual world (*ā'lam-i-rūhānī*), the Predecessor (*jadd*) is equivalent to the mineral in the material world; the Opening (*fatḥ*), from [the perspective of the] the spiritual world, is equivalent to the vegetable in the material world; and the Imagination (*khayāl*), from [the perspective of the] the spiritual world, is equivalent to the animal in the material world. And each of these three originations of the material world are divided into two parts such that the mineral is [divided into] two parts as being either purified [or '*refined*'] (*qudākhtanī*) or unpurified [or '*turbid*']; and the vegetable is [divided into] two parts, it is either fruitful (*bārvar*) [or '*plentiful*'] or it is barren; and likewise the animal, it is either rational (*nāṭiq*) or it is irrational.

This condition is proof that each of these three spiritual limits leaves a trace [or '*effect*'] (*athar*) in the two worlds. And the spiritual world [itself] is like a refined pearl which always remains in its own state whereas the material world resembles an unrefined pearl whose condition is in [a state of] gyration (*gardandih*) which does not [always] remain in the same condition. The spiritual world is like the fertile ['*fruitful*' or '*plentiful*'] vegetable in so far as its resultant beneficial determinants [or '*activities*'] at all times survive ['*subsist*', '*effectuate*' or '*remain*'] (*bāqī*) whereas the material world is as an unripe vegetable where no resultant beneficial determinant [or '*activity*'] has occurred. The spiritual world is like a living creature who speaks (*sokhangu*) inasmuch as its substance is [derived] from the divine cause [or '*command*'] [which generated it] - in so far as it is defined by words and in action - whereas the material world is like a living creature who is mute [or '*incapable of speech*'] just like quadrupeds desiring [to speak but are incapable of it] (*righbat-i-satūrān*) and those like them.

The consequence ['*trace*' or '*effect*'] of each (metaphysical) limit among these three spiritual limits in the supernal (spiritual) world is for it to become a beneficiary [or '*receptacle*'] of the (metaphysical) limit which is higher [or '*better*'] (*bartar*) than it; and its effect in the material world is to make that beneficent [force] reach that (metaphysical) limit below it; because, we say, the Predecessor (*jadd*) becomes the beneficiary of the power of the cause [or '*causation*'] of Soul (*nafs*), and from this, in its descent from [or '*effusion below*'] (*furūd*) itself, it makes it reach the Opening (*fatḥ*); and the Opening (*fatḥ*) becomes the beneficiary of the Predecessor (*jadd*), and from this, in its descent from [or '*effusion below*'] itself, it makes it reach the

Imagination (*khayāl*); and the Imagination (*khayāl*) becomes the beneficiary of the Opening (*fatḥ*), and from this in its descent from [or '*effusion below*'] itself, it makes it reach the Speaker (*nāṭiq*); and the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) holds the same rank in the material world which the Intelligence (*'aql*) holds in the spiritual world.

Therefore, from the beneficent [cause] of the Imagination (*khayāl*), who is higher [or 'better'] than it, and to which it has served as the beneficiary [or '*receptacle*'], the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) conveys [or '*transmits*'] to the Executor (*waṣī*) whose descent [or '*effusion*'] is like the example of the beneficial reception (*pazīroftan*) by the Intelligence from the Cause [or '*command*'] and its transmission to the Universal Soul (*nafs-i-kullī*); for within the supernal (spiritual) world the Executor (*waṣī*) is as the same as [or '*corresponds to*'] the station (*rutba*) of Soul (*nafs*). As such, from the beneficent [cause] of the Speaker (*nāṭiq*), who is higher [or '*better*'] than it, the Executor (*waṣī*) transmits to the *Imām*, who is below it [in rank], like the example of the beneficial reception (*pazīroftan*) by the Soul (*nafs*) from the Intelligence (*'aql*) and its transmission to the Predecessor (*jadd*); and in the material world the *Imām* occupies the rank (*manzilat*) which is the same as the [rank of the] Predecessor (*jadd*) in the spiritual world.

Given this, from the beneficent [cause] of the Executor (*waṣī*), who is higher [or '*better*'] than it, the *Imām* transmits to his own Gate [or '*threshold*'] (*bāb*), who is below it [in rank], like the example of the beneficial reception by the Predecessor (*jadd*) from the Universal Soul (*nafs-i-kullī*) and its transmission to the Opening (*fatḥ*); and in the material world the Gate [or '*threshold*'] (*bāb*) of the *Imām* holds the same rank which the Opening (*fatḥ*) holds in the supernal [spiritual] world. As such, from the beneficent [cause] of the *Imām*, who is higher [or '*better*'] than it, the Gate [or '*threshold*'] (*bāb*) transmits to the Proof (*ḥujjat*), who is below it [in rank], like the example of the beneficial reception by the Opening (*fatḥ*) from the Predecessor (*jadd*) and its transmission to the Imagination (*khayāl*). Therefore, within the material world, the Proof (*ḥujjat*) occupies the same rank as the Imagination (*khayāl*) in the spiritual world; and there is no passage (*gozar nīst*) by [or '*after*'? the transmission of] the Proof (*ḥujjat*) to the Aid (*ta'yīd*), and [over to] its descending (*furūd*) beneficiaries (*pazīrandigān*), [because] the commands [or '*causes*'] can be adduced [openly?] by reception and not by ciphers (*ramz*).

The chosen Messenger, the salutations of God be upon him and his household, likened and equated these material limits with the spiritual limits so that by demonstrations the wise may discern the material limits and understand the spiritual limits thereby; this, so that each person may determine their own limit and

testify to the correctness of this assertion in the words of the chosen Messenger, the salutations of God be upon him and his household, who said: "*I took from five and I was given by five*"...

The material world is not nor has it ever been bereft of a single person [or '*body*'] whose eyes have not been afflicted (*chashm zaḥm*) without (divine) Aid (*ta'yīd*) from the supernal (spiritual) world connecting with them such that creation and the world may thereby endure by this (divine) Aid (*ta'yīd*). And such a person is either a prophet (*payāmbar*) in his own time (*zamān-i-khod*) or an Executor (*waṣī*) within his own era (*'asr-i-khīsh*); or he may be an *Imām* among his children during his own days (*ruzgār-i-khīsh*) and the transmitter of the (divine) Aid (*ta'yīd*) from the cause [or '*command*'] of the Creator, glory be to him. To the prophet belongs the cycle of the (metaphysical) limit (*dawr-i-ḥadd ast*) and the transmitter of the (divine) Aid (*ta'yīd*) to the Executor (*waṣī*). During his (i.e. the Executor's) era (*'asr*) the Messenger is the Opening (*fatḥ*) and the transmitter of the (divine) Aid (*ta'yīd*). To the *Imām* during his days he (i.e. the Messenger) is [or '*belongs*'] the Imagination (*khayāl*); and in the material world other than these three (i.e. the Messenger, the Executor and the *Imām*) no one else is the recipient [or '*beneficiary*'] of the (divine) Aid (*ta'yīd*).

And testimony to the truth of this claim regarding the world is this, that luminosity (*rushanā'ī*) in the world is based on three foundations (*sih aṣl*): one is from the sun, who (*ū*) is warm [or '*possesses heat*'], is luminous and is subsistent. It (i.e. the sun) can be likened to the Predecessor (*jadd*) who is the beneficiary [or '*receptacle*'] of the Universal Soul, which is the foundation (*aṣl*) and not the branch (*far'*); and [from this] it bestows upon the Opening (*fatḥ*) which is the branch and not the foundation (*far'*). And the other [foundations of] luminosity in the world are from the moon and the stars, who possess luminosity and subsistence but not heat; and this is like the example of the Opening (*fatḥ*) who is the beneficiary of the Predecessor (*jadd*); and [from this] it bestows upon the branch which is the Imagination (*khayāl*). Another source of luminosity in the world is fire which possesses heat and luminosity but is not subsistent, and it can be likened to the Imagination (*khayāl*) which is the beneficiary of the spiritual branch (*far'-i-rūhānī*) and bestows upon the material foundation (*asl-i-jismānī*) which is the Speaker (*nāṭiq*).

Therefore, just as within the material world luminosity is [or '*derives*'] from these three masters [or '*divinities*'] of light (*khudāvandān-i-nūr*) – i.e. the sun, the moon, the stars and in third place, fire, each possessing its own [unique] condition - likewise is luminosity [derived] within the world of religion from these three masters [or '*divinities*'] of spiritual light: one being the Predecessor (*jadd*), the other the Opening

(*fatḥ*) and the third the Imagination (*khayāl*), each possessing its own condition in reception of the command [or '*cause*'] and its transmission thereby, just as we have explained.

And testimony from the soul of humanity, to that which it is more complete an originator of the material world, rests upon the evidence of these three spiritual branches wherein the soul of humans is the couple [or '*dyad*'] (*juft*) of the Intelligence, and whereby from their material bodies their activities (*fi 'l-hā*) always become apparent. It has three powers each of which stands [in the function of] completing the two forms [or '*faces*'] (*ṣūrat*) of humanity, one being the material form and the other the spiritual form. Each of these three powers possessed by humanity is the form of the powers of the (divine) Aid (*ta'yīd*) and is equivalent to the Predecessor (*jadd*); and the other is the sensual [or '*concupiscent*'] power (*shahvānī*) which is equivalent to the Opening (*fatḥ*) while the third is the power of speech which is equivalent to the Imagination (*khayāl*).

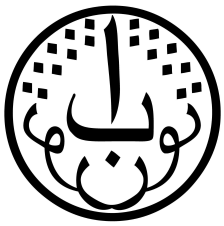
We have compared the lesser world (*ā'lam-kahīn*), which is humanity, to the spiritual world, and since we made the world of religion equivalent to the souls of humanity, we say that the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) is equivalent to the vegetative soul (*nafs-i-nāmīya*) of humanity, and its source ['*basis*' or '*foundation*'] (*asās*) is equivalent to the sensual [or '*concupiscent*'] soul of humanity. The *Imām* is equivalent to the rational [or '*speaking*'] soul (*nafs-i-nāṭiqa*) of humanity for the reason that it (i.e. the rational soul) has been present from the outset of [each] person's physical existence, which from infancy grows [or '*develops*'] like the vegetable [to maturity]; for just as the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) is the commencement [or '*initiation*'] of the world of religion, which appears from him, religion and the sensual [or '*concupiscent*'] soul are the (separate) intervals (*miāna*) of the *beinghood* (*būdash*) of humanity who [in their unawakened or unspiritualized state] focus [or '*search*'] for food and drink [or '*wine*'] and then attain better than it (i.e. transcend their sensual condition) (*bihtar az ān guzīdan gīrad*). Just as the source ['*basis*' or '*foundation*'] (*asās*) of the esoteric exegesis of the truth (*tawīl-i-ḥaqq*) makes the wise voracious [or '*greedy*'] (*ḥarīṣ*) to separate truth from error, so too does the [common] peoples endeavours [or '*search*'] for physical [or '*ego satiating*'] food (*ghazā-i-nafsānī*) make them voracious [or '*greedy*'] (*ḥarīṣ*).

The rational [or '*speaking*'] soul (*nafs-i-nāṭiqa*) is the last [stage to manifest] in humanity, and once it has appeared [or '*manifested*'] humanity has been completed in its *beinghood* (*būdash*), which is something the soul itself knows, just as the *Imām* in its (i.e. the soul's) finality [or '*the last Imām*', i.e. the *Qā'im*] is its support [or '*refuge*'] (*mu'ayyad*) because it is he who delivers humanity from annihilation (*fanā'*)

to subsistence (*baqā'*). The ciphers and metaphors of the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) can in truth be adduced to indicate the recognition of the *Imām*; for just as the rational [or '*speaking*'] soul is more eminent than other souls, so too is the *Imām* greater than other ranks. And testimony to the truth of this utterance is this, that the rank of the *Imām* is the rank of the master [or 'divinity'] of the Resurrection (*qīyamat*), upon him be peace, for all the Speakers (*nāṭiqān*) of creation have called [creation] towards him; and it was because of the eminence and rank of the *imamate* that the most high God proclaimed that on the day of Resurrection every people shall be called to its *Imām:* "*upon the day wherein we shall call every people to their Imām*" (*Qur'ān* **17:71**)...and he did not say [instead] '*we shall call them* [on that day] *to their messengers*'.

We have explained [or '*delineated*'] the discussion around the demonstration of three spiritual branches, which are the subsistence of the material world and the edifice of the world of religion, which is [or '*subsists*'] by their intercession [or '*intermediation*'] in that measure [or '*degree*'] to which the initiate (*mustajīb*) who knows the way may speak of the awakening.

13 Azar 1391 *shamsī*
3 December 2012 CE



N. Wahid Azal © 2012